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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002251

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/I AND NEA/IR, NSC FOR PETER VROOMAN AND  
KELLY MAGSAMEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/18/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: MEK/ASHRAF UPDATE: GOI PLANNING TO RELOCATE MEK  
AFTER RAMADAN

REF: BAGHDAD 2186 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Political Counselor Yuri Kim for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: During an August 18 meeting with the Commander of Task Force 134 and Poloff, Ali al-Yassery, the chairman of the GOI's Ashraf Committee stated: (1) the GOI regrets the loss of life and will continue to abide by Iraq's laws and constitution in its dealing with the Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MEK); (2) increased domestic pressure to act against the MEK and the latter's animosity to the Iraqi state necessitate GOI action; (3) the GOI plans to relocate the MEK after Ramadan to Muthanna province in the south; and (3) the GOI would be willing to offer temporary legal status to the MEK only after they agree to relocate within Iraq. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) During an August 18 meeting with Brigadier General David Quantock (CG TF-134) and Post's Iran Watcher (IW) Ali Yassery, Chairman of the GOI's Ashraf Committee (and close relative of PM Maliki) expressed GOI regret at the loss of life (11 total MEK fatalities as of Aug 18), but asserted that the MEK comports itself as an enemy of the state with a nefarious agenda. However, despite the MEK's animosity, the GOI would continue to tread carefully with the organization "in accordance with our laws and constitution," Yassery noted.

13. (C) BG Quantock cautioned against repeating the mistakes that lead to deaths and injuries. He recommended that the GOI allow the residents to remain in Ashraf until appropriate repatriation options had been identified by the GOI and UNHCR. Yassery concurred with the importance of timely repatriation, but explained that the GOI plans to relocate the MEK residents (approx 3400 at last count) after Ramadan (late September/early October) to Muthanna province. When asked how the GOI plans to overcome MEK resistance to relocation and the likelihood of renewed violence, Yassery stated confidently that the GOI will be better prepared and ready to isolate and arrest key leaders in order to decapitate the leadership structure, thereby facilitating outreach to the rank and file. The GOI is also prepared to relocate the residents in small groups as needed, "but we will not force them out of Iraq," Yassery explained.

14. (C) BG Quantock suggested the GOI offer inducements to secure MEK buy-in for the relocation, including possible legal status in Iraq. Yassery said the GOI would entertain an offer of temporary legal status, valid for one year, and renewable, only after the MEK agree to relocate within Iraq. Any offer of temporary status would require PM Maliki's approval, he noted, offering to raise the issue with Maliki later this week.

15. (C) According to Yassery, UNHCR has informed the GOI that it will only deal with the residents once they leave Ashraf,

thereby underscoring the need to relocate the residents. "Moving them will strip them of their identity, thereby allowing us to deal with them as regular civilians rather than members of a militant organization," Yassery noted. However, he warned that if the MEK does not relocate, Iraqi courts will issue arrest warrants for those residents with any ties to the 1991 suppression of the Shia uprising in Iraq. (NOTE: Many Iraqis detest the MEK for its alliance with Saddam and role in carrying out alleged atrocities against Shias and Kurds. END NOTE.)

¶6. (C) Yassery also mentioned that UNHCR has identified five of the 22 MEK defectors, currently housed in a Baghdad hotel, Qof the 22 MEK defectors, currently housed in a Baghdad hotel, as refugees eligible for repatriation. According to Yassery, the defectors are pleasantly surprised at the good treatment they are receiving from the GOI and are eager to go to Ashraf and recruit other defectors, offering to dress in military disguise and sneak in at night if needed. Yassery said he did not approve the defectors' plan given inherent security risks.

¶7. (C) Regarding the 36 MEK detainees currently being held in Khalis, Yassery noted that they will face criminal charges for attacking Iraqi security forces, a crime that carries a 10 year prison sentence. An Iraqi judge has met with the detainees and an investigation is underway. Yassery explained that the legal process could take up to six months.

COMMENT  
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¶8. (C) The GOI is committed to relocating the MEK residents and confident of weathering the PR maelstrom if violence flares up after Ramadan. The MEK issue has also become an election issue, prompting public statements from Shia and Kurdish groups calling for the groups dismantlement. Iranian FM Mottaki's public statements calling for the "hypocrites'" extradition to Iran has also elevated public rhetoric. It appears unlikely the GOI would extradite the residents, preferring instead to try them in Iraqi courts for crimes against the people of Iraq. The MEK continue to live in denial, hoping that international pressure and sympathy will allow them to regain their lost footing and sanctuary in Iraq.

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